

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA HIGHWAY PATROL

**CONTACT: OFFICE OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS
(916) 657-7202
(916) 657-8639 - FAX**



August 24, 1999

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

99-16

CALIFORNIA TRAFFIC DEATHS HIT 42-YEAR LOW

SACRAMENTO – Traffic deaths dropped to a 42-year low in 1998, paced by double-digit declines in motorcycle and pedestrian fatalities, according to the California Highway Patrol (CHP).

The CHP's Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System (SWITRS) showed that 3,459 people died in crashes on California's highways in 1998, down 5.8 percent from 1997 when there were 3,671 fatalities. Deaths were the lowest since 1955, when 3,431 people died.

Motorcycle deaths dropped 15.3 percent, from 235 in 1997 to 199 in 1998. Pedestrian deaths went down 10.7 percent, from 783 in 1997 to 698 in 1998.

"The California Motorcyclist Safety Program and the motorcycle helmet law have demonstrated their effectiveness in saving lives," said Commissioner D. O. "Spike" Helmick. He noted that motorcyclist casualties have dropped for the eleventh straight year since the safety program was initiated in 1987. The helmet law was enacted by the Legislature in 1992.

Helmick said CHP education programs in several communities statewide have promoted pedestrian safety.

"Lives are being saved by a combination of enforcement and education," Helmick said. "We're vigorously enforcing speed and DUI laws at the same time we're educating motorists about slowing down and designating a driver."

The 1998 statistics also highlight another milestone – a 7.8 percent drop in the mileage death rate. The mileage death rate is the number of fatalities per 100 million miles of vehicle travel.

- M O R E -

2-2-2-2-2

Despite an increase in the miles Californians drove in 1998, the mileage death rate dropped from 1.29 in 1997 to 1.19 in 1998. The 1998 figure is the lowest since the state began keeping figures in 1942.

“I commend the California Highway Patrol, the Office of Traffic Safety, Caltrans, and local law enforcement for their efforts to make California a national leader in traffic safety,” said Maria Contreras-Sweet, Secretary of Business, Transportation and Housing.

“Governor Davis and I are committed to making transportation safer for Californians. By implementing effective traffic safety programs — such as our recent fight against so-called aggressive drivers — combined with our message to buckle up and not drink and drive, I am confident the number of traffic accidents and fatalities will continue to go down,” said Contreras-Sweet.

#